

THE NATIONAL GUARDIAN
23 JULY 1975

Reveal CIA drug operation in Laos

Guardian staff correspondent

Vientiane, Laos

Police here are investigating a huge former drug smuggling operation that was linked to the CIA and rightwing political figures.

Founded in October 1963 as the Vientiane School for the Blind, it was one of the major CIA operations in Laos and had been exporting large quantities of hashish and opium. Now that the rightist politicians have fled the country, patriotic police are uncovering the full story.

The director of the school was an Australian national, who operated under numerous aliases and had the protection of the hired thugs of rightwing politicians, now in Thailand. Gregory Rogers, one of the Australian's aliases, fled to Bangkok only a few weeks ago.

In one of three houses Rogers used on the outskirts of the city, police

discovered an enormous telephone switchboard and equipment capable of monitoring telephone conversations from anywhere in the world. Every room was bugged and police could hear the whispers of their colleagues downstairs amplified from a room on the top floor.

At the "school," located on land "donated" by an extreme rightist, former Defense Minister Sisouk Na Champassak, investigators found equipment for transforming marijuana into hashish oil. And they found a laboratory for reducing opium into heroin at another house Rogers used.

Former employees told police the hashish was shipped out of Vientiane on CIA Air America planes. Destined for Bangkok, Saigon and other cities, the drugs were contained in hollow souvenir elephants and Buddha

statues. Rogers was also involved in smuggling art treasures from museums and pagodas, it has been learned.

One of the main sponsors of the "school for the blind" was "Pop" Buell, a well-known CIA operative, who first arrived in Laos in 1959. He became an "expert" on the Meo people and was an advisor to Gen. Yang Pao, who organized the CIA's Meo mercenary army. Rogers arrived in Laos as a Jehovah Witness "minister" a year before Buell and the two men became cronies. At one point, Rogers was deported for raping a girl of 14, but soon returned without his moustache and with a new name and a wife.

At last report, Rogers was reported to be planning to open a new "school for the blind" in Thailand.

W.B.